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# Alternatives

## FLIPPING THE ACADEMIC CONFERENCE, OR HOW WE WROTE A PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLE IN A DAY

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FLIPPING THE ACADEMIC CONFERENCE, OR HOW WE WROTE A PEER-REVIEWED  
JOURNAL ARTICLE IN A DAY

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AU2  
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Abstract

Is it possible to write a publishable, peer-reviewed academic paper in a day? We attempted this task in 2016, motivated by a desire to find new ways of doing academic work in the face of our growing sense of alienation within the neoliberal academy. This paper provides our analysis of academic alienation and an auto-ethnography of our experiment. We discuss four lessons learned: (1) knowledge as a social relation, (2) time and the academy, (3) gender and collaborative writing, and (4) the contradictions and possibilities of anarchy and authorship. We also offer practical advice for scholars looking to engage in similar collaborations.

Introduction

On April 19, 2018 we received an email from the editors of X stating: “After careful consideration from the editorial team, we are happy to inform you that we have accepted your contribution for publication.” Our manuscript, “Y,” was officially going to see the light of day nearly two years after we began the project in a computer lab on the campus of the

University of Southampton. This paper has a strange origin story. It was the product of an experiment in co-authorship and an absurdly ambitious effort to write a peer-reviewable academic article in one day.

Our motivations for undertaking this project flowed from a shared sense of alienation from our academic work. The idea of starting the writing process from collaboration—rather than assuming traditional isolated authorship—emerged from a desire to cultivate a practice of sociality in our thinking and writing. Over the course of this successful experiment in collaborative writing we also developed a number of critical insights into the possibilities and limitations of academic writing and collaboration. We found ourselves thinking more clearly about knowledge as a social relation and about how time works within the academy. We also saw how feminist and anarchist commitments and theories made it possible to think critically about the contradictions and possibilities of authorship.

In this paper we share our experiment with alternative forms, practices, and politics of academic writing. We first explain the theoretical and political concerns motivating our experiment. We then provide an auto-ethnography of the project, how it unfolded, and its many ups and down. We then return to our theoretical analysis to ask: How successful was this experiment, what are its possibilities and limitations, and does it offer a viable alternative to the dominant model of academic knowledge production?

### **Alienation and Hierarchy in the Neoliberal Academy**

Higher education has experienced profound and fundamental transformations in recent decades. Universities around the world are increasingly treated as sources of economic growth and job training, rather than important institutions for the cultivation of democratic

citizens, meaningful personal development, and the broader public good (Côté and Allahar 2007, Bousquet 2008, Newfield 2008, 2016, McGettigan 2013, Kamola 2019). Administrators, accreditors and policy-makers increasingly expect academic research to be profitable, academic labour to be efficient, and outcomes to be immediately measurable (Slaughter and Leslie 1997, Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). The result has been a profound academic speed-up, marked by a growing demand that scholars produce higher volumes of published work—with academic hiring, tenure, promotion, and department funding tied to our “productivity” (Moten and Harney 1999). These demands are accompanied by a pervasive audit culture that tracks our outputs and builds in rewards and punishments based on our publishing records (Shore and Wright 2000). The UK REF and its ‘impact’ agenda are prime examples.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, alienation has come to define much of our scholarly work. Scholars produce papers that often feel deeply personal, yet they stop being our property. They become things we submit to journals and hopefully get published somewhere so we can put them on our CVs. If our institutions feel generous, they pay Open Access fees; otherwise our articles are pay-walled and owned by multinational publishing conglomerates. Scholars provide the labour of research and peer review for free, while many for-profit publishers benefit from the revenues generated by bulk journal subscriptions. Those who are most productive, churning out a steady supply of publications, might get an academic job, and eventually tenure and promotion. Those who, for a whole variety of reasons, work more

<sup>1</sup> REF refers to the UK Research Excellence Framework – a semi-regular audit of research productivity in the UK. Each academic’s research outputs over the previous five to seven year period are scored on a four-point scale and academic departments are allotted government research funds based upon the department’s grade point average (Blagden 2018).

slowly often find themselves leaving the academy, or existing on its margins. This exploitative and top-down structure of academic knowledge production is a curious way to create new, meaningful ideas. It is, as Marx foresaw, a way to ensure that all aspects of our working life — including the academic conference, the job “market,” tenure, and peer review — remain competitive experiences where workers are pitted against each other over a pool of scarce resources (Marx 1972, 59-62; see also Rowan 1981, Oliver 1992).

Even the most social aspect of academic research—the conference—has become a high-stakes, competitive and alienating venue, especially for many graduate students, those without full-time employment, and those seeking to move from under-resourced institutions (Nicolson 2017). The traditional research presentation anchoring the conference experience does not accurately reflect the needs of the vast majority of the academic workforce (King 2006, Deardorff 2015, Wampole 2015, Rom 2012, 2015). Conferences reproduce many hierarchies and exclusions, especially for graduate students, students of colour, people with disabilities, women, and those with child-care responsibilities (Alexander-Floyd, Orey, and Brown-Dean 2015, Rutherford 2015, Kamola 2017, Bos, Sweet-Cushman, and Schneider 2017; Price 2009; Henderson, 2019, 2018, 2015; Hodge 2014). Other critical scholars decry the ways that academic conferences neglect the valuable knowledge of the very people and communities they claim to study (Sixteen Participants 2019).<sup>2</sup> Indigenous scholars show ways that academic conferences re-inscribe settler colonialism, negate indigenous presence and contributions, and contribute to the “erasure of Indigenous land and jurisdiction” (Coulthard and Simpson 2016, 249; Hunt 2013). Still others express frustration over the slow

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<sup>2</sup> A video of this conference protest is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXW2NULQV9g> (see also De Jong et al 2019)

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pace of gender-based inclusion at major conferences in the field (Henehan and Sarkees 2009).

This experience of conference alienation initially inspired us to explore the possibility of using the academic conference for different purposes. We wanted to see if the academic conference could be a place where we deliberately and productively collaborate with other scholars in the co-construction of ideas. In 2013 AU3 and AU2 were commiserating at a conference about the inherently alienating experience of being academics in the twenty-first century. Both were struck by a similar observation: the typical conference experience involves busy scholars spending the weeks before a conference frantically assembling papers to circulate to panels and discussants who are too busy with their own projects to pay much notice. Stressing out about our presentations in the days prior to our panels, only to present the material to a small handful of understandably disinterested colleagues. Maybe, if you are lucky, you will get a question or two in the last fifteen minutes of the session. On rare occasions these questions might even touch upon what you said in the paper, but usually they reflect someone else’s particular concerns. When the session is over everyone dashes off to the next item on their conference schedules. We found these professional conferences alienating, unproductive, as well as financially costly and emotionally draining.

Out of our shared sense of discontentment we raised the question: what if we flipped the conference on its head? We wondered what would happen if academics came to a conference without a pre-written paper to share. What if people came with nothing but themselves, met fellow scholars, and together wrote a paper from scratch? What if this proved such an efficient way to write that it was possible to write a paper in a day? Could we come together as a group with divergent theoretical, political, intellectual, and methodological concerns and, in real time, negotiate, adapt, and bend our own intellectual

positions collaboratively? Would it be possible to simultaneously restage the conference as a meaningful intellectual encounter, while also producing a publishable outcome legible to our employers and the broader disciplines? And what if this collaborative form of knowledge production became a defining feature of one's academic conference experience?

Horizontal, collaborative, and hyper-efficient publishing could mean working less, or having more time to pursue those (academic or non-academic) projects requiring time above and beyond what is recognized by professional accounting metrics. If successful, we imagined that after only a couple of such events one could have the requisite CV needed for the job market, for tenure, or for the REF. Developing an alternative practices of academic knowledge production—ones that result in better thinking, intensive collaboration, as well as a reduction in overall writing time—was the inspiration for the workshop at the University of Southampton.

### **The Practice of Co-Authorship**

After the initial musing, AU2 moved to England. At BISA 2015, he found himself in a very similar conversation with AU5 about how alienating conferences are. Upon sharing the earlier discussion with Isaac, AU5 blurted out: “That’s f[antastically] brilliant! You should do it!” So AU2 and AU3 spent a good month developing a proposal for a collaborative pre-conference workshop at ISA, an application that was promptly rejected. AU2 then secured funding from his director of research at University of Southampton. At this point, AU6 joined in the planning process.<sup>3</sup> Yet as we began inviting people to join us, a surprising

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<sup>3</sup> AU6 participated fully in the original article from the initial workshop through publication. However, AU6 opted not to participate in this article as s/he is currently exploring career opportunities outside the academy for precisely the reasons outlined in the beginning of this article.



obstacle appeared: we had a very hard time finding interested parties to participate in our collaboration.

We received many polite declines to our invitation for the workshop – perhaps everyone was busy that day in June. But our strong suspicion was that our initial proposal came across as simply bonkers – “Would you like to come to University of Southampton and try to write a paper in a day?” We eventually managed to get seven people to commit to the workshop on June 13, 2016. The invitation was deliberately open ended; we did not want to specify in advance what the paper would be about. Instead, we wanted each scholar to write a short 500-word statement about what they were interested in at the moment. That was it. We wanted people to bring what they had, and hoped a conversation would culminate in the production of a paper. At the last minute two of our participants pulled out for personal reasons. So in the end it was just AU1, AU2, AU3, AU5, and AU6.

The structure of the workshop was simple. We met at a computer lab at 9:00am and stood around in a circle eating pastries and drinking tea as each participant introduced themselves and presented their statement. The common theme was violence. During the first round we listened to each other without critique. We then began the first brainstorming session in which we identified a number of common themes that had emerged. By 11:30am we focused on a shared suspicion that Stephen Pinker’s book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, was profoundly flawed, though none of us could fully articulate why we thought it was wrong. We wrote up a rough plan for a paper on the whiteboard and decided to break.

After lunch we divided the paper into five sections: literature review, Pinker’s thesis, phenomenology, the changing character of violence, and empirical proofs of the theory. By 2:30pm we had first drafts of section. After reconvening and discussing our progress, we returned to the writing, either alone or in pairs depending on our allotted tasks, and

completed our drafts by 4:00pm. We all worked with AU6 on what empirical data sets we might use to support our argument, and how our theoretical insights might translate into an empirical project. By the end of the day we had around 7,000 words based on our lunchtime outline. Unsurprisingly, this first draft was not terribly good; it read as if five different people had written something and slapped it together. But it also was not terribly bad either, and it did say something that was new *to us*. Over dinner we agreed that, as a next step, each of us would take the paper for an additional day over the summer, rewrite it, and try to shape it into a workable draft.

Our group faced two critical junctures following the day-long workshop. The first, and most important, was our commitment in the months after the workshop to complete a round of revisions that turned a rough draft into a paper we could share with a colleague. To constrain the workload, we developed a guideline that nobody should work on the paper longer than four hours at a time. The document circulated through the authors a number of times, and by late July we had a 12,000-word draft that we were ready to share. At this point we debated what to do, and agreed that we should recruit a reader for feedback. In withdrawing from the Southampton workshop, AU4 had offered to read a draft and offer comments. So we took her up on the offer. She came back with considerable enthusiasm for the project, and brilliant feedback, so we asked if she wanted to come onboard as a co-author. By November we had a draft that all agreed was ready for submission.

To our surprise in early February 2017 we received an R&R from X on our first attempt. We quickly discovered, however, that we had very different interpretations of how to respond to the decision letter. This prompted a meeting at ISA and then a long Skype call to agree on revisions. We eventually broke this deadlock by creating a spreadsheet that listed each revision request in the decision letter and then assigning it to a specific author. Rather

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3 than trying to rewrite the whole thing together, we divvied it up into specific tasks to revise  
4 individually. Once the revised draft was completed, AU1 and AU4 read through and rewrote  
5 the text line-by-line to bring more consistency to the authorial voice. We submitted the  
6 revised version in August 2017 and received a conditional acceptance in November 2017,  
7 almost a year from the initial submission.  
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14 This is where things started to break down from a teamwork standpoint. A  
15 conditional acceptance is usually the end of the process, requiring just some light revising per  
16 editor guidelines, followed by proofing. Two things happened at the conditional acceptance  
17 stage, however. First, our conditional acceptance was almost entirely about the voice of the  
18 manuscript. With six different authors, the text was clunky with an inconsistent tone and  
19 style. We also had significant differences in writing cultures. American Academic writing  
20 tends to favor an active voice and strong signposting, whereas British styles may be more  
21 literary and indirect. The journal reviewers and editor were also concerned that the paper  
22 contained too much literature review. As a result, we spent more time rewriting for style than  
23 we did on the first two drafts for substance. We almost missed the submission deadline as  
24 we struggled to revise the paper. We introduced new arguments into the conditional  
25 acceptance draft and reworked the entire text one more time. We thought we were done, but  
26 two weeks after our re-submission we received a second conditional acceptance, which none  
27 of us had experienced before.  
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46 At this point we were frustrated. While the requests from the editors were very clear,  
47 we disagreed on how to implement them. Eventually, we opted for a “dictator,” one person  
48 with managerial control on implementing the new changes. AU2 was appointed dictator.  
49 Working with AU1, they set up a workflow where they called each other on Skype and  
50 worked during the day, screen sharing a lot of time. This model ensured that two people  
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3 were always working together on the editing process. It took about fifty hours of writing for  
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5 AU2 and AU1 to completely revise the manuscript. We then handed it to AU4 to line edit,  
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7 and asked the others for comments. This time the manuscript was accepted without  
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9 conditions.  
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### 11 12 13 14 **Reflections and auto-critique** 15

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17 This project started as an experiment designed to address very practical questions about  
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19 academic authorship, alienation, and workload. In many ways this experiment accomplished  
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21 its goals of providing a pleasurable, invigorating, humane, and productive practice of  
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23 academic writing. In addition to learning some practical lessons about co-authorship (see  
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25 Appendix 1), we also gained a number of theoretical and conceptual insights that might  
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27 prove helpful for those interested in pursuing co-writing projects. These insights touch on  
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29 questions about the social relations and practices of knowledge-making, the regulation of  
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31 time within the academy, and the importance of feminist and anarchist theory for  
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33 understanding the challenges and opportunities that come with collaborative intellectual  
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35 work. Taken together, these four insights raise important questions about the possibilities  
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37 and limitations of reconfiguring the conditions of academic knowledge production within  
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39 the neoliberal academy.  
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### 46 *Knowledge-Making as Social Relations* 47

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49 Writing is often solitary, but it does not have to be lonely. Prior to this project, most of us  
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51 had primarily written single-authored papers. In addition, some of us work in isolated,  
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53 teaching-heavy institutional locations. Together, these individualized academic practices  
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55 impact our thinking, resulting in an analytic feedback loop or echo chamber in our heads.  
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We found that working together made it possible to get a closer look at how others approach intellectual questions, what assumptions they work from but, even more importantly, how they approach the argument-making process. For example, AU4 recounts:

My first task on this project was to read an early draft of the article three times (and several sections more often). Each time I was excited and relieved to read the argument. As I read it, the draft articulated, explained and addressed a profound problem at the heart of IR scholarship that has long bothered me but I didn't have the tools, language and methods to tackle.... I'm not (and have never been) an abstract thinker. Part of this is idiosyncratic, part of it is bound up with my research methodology (painfully slow and ethnographic). Yet the draft paper articulated something I have long been trying to get at ethnographically: the violence of international politics perpetrated, masked, remade and reinforced through the very liberal institutions that claim to remedy it. It was incredible to see a group people write such an ambitious argument at (what is for me) a faster pace. In contrast, I am a slow writer and I focus on details. With that in mind, my approach was to help rewrite the draft through a long, slow process of tinkering with sentences with an emphasis on clarity, legibility, and accessibility. I focused a lot on line edits and active sentences.

The process, in other words, made it possible for each author to contribute their strengths to the shared project, while avoiding those elements of the writing process that consume time when done individually.

Working with multiple co-authors also meant developing new ways of doing academic work. One of the re-writes involved a four-day-long line-by-line edit (over skype and across a six-hour time difference) where AU1 read the entire manuscript aloud and AU4 edited each sentence as needed. The collaborative writing process also meant continually making intellectual concessions. For example, AU5 and AU1 collaborated on drafting the phenomenology section, yet each brought different interpretations of phenomenology. We came to learn that it was vital to set aside our own pet-projects and unique concerns, along with our egos, and to focus on the collaboration. None of us were especially precious with our words, which really helped us work through the multiple revisions of the paper.

It is essential to trust each other during the revision process. This trust was formed during the day-long summit, which gave us an opportunity to get an up-close look at other people's thinking and writing processes. This made it possible, over time, to rewrite each other's words without asking permission and without tracking every change. It was important to maintain an ethic that no word was precious. As AU2 explained to AU4: "just change what you feel needs to be changed. If it's important enough for the previous author to notice, someone will change it back." This approach not only demonstrated a commitment to the process but also confidence in each other and the group itself.

### *Rethinking Knowledge-Making*

Addressing the colonial, white supremacist and patriarchal foundations of our discipline requires us to create alternative practices of knowledge production that push back against the alienating pressures placed upon us by the neoliberal academy (De Jong et al 2019). Indeed, students and scholars increasingly recognize the need to mitigate the pervasive inequities of neoliberal higher education and seek to rebalance citation counts, avoid all-white and all male

conference panels, and address the whiteness and eurocentrism of our syllabi.<sup>4</sup> A number of academic institutions and publishers have incrementally accepted these strategies as best practices (e.g. Brown and Samuels 2018).

This disciplining of the writing process is compounded by formal and informal barriers to publishing in high profile journals that include (but are by no means limited to) lack of funding, lack of access to elite institutions in the global north, disciplinary norms and networks, English-language dominance, narrow disciplinary agendas, conceptual “misfit” and rigid lexicons (Misalucha 2015, 3, see also: King 2004, Misra, Lundquist, and Templer 2012, Roos and Gatta 2009, Medie and Kang 2018, Maliniak et al. 2018).

To this end, we looked for new ways to engage in knowledge-making. Richa Nagar and her transnational feminist co-authors show how collaborative writing practices can provide opportunities for creative and subversive knowledge-making across many kinds of borders in and far beyond the academy (Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006, Nagar and Swarr 2010, Nagar 2014). Transnational feminist and other decolonial scholars consider ways to engage in knowledge-making that stretch, challenge and disrupt what counts as expert research – and the notion of expertise itself (Rutazibwa 2019). Notably, Sangtin Writers – as well as Nagar’s wide-ranging collaborative work - expose taken-for-granted academic hierarchies and exploitations, question individual claims to knowledge, and re-focus attention on “relational practices of knowledge making” (Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Chowdhury et al. 2016, 1800).

These transnational feminist and decolonial practices informed our project and they also help us to retrospectively scrutinize closely what it is we have/have not done. Our

<sup>4</sup> See for example Saara Särämä’s feminist interventions, discussed in Dever & Adkins 2015.

project is much more narrowly focused on academic (and disciplinary) knowledge-production than the far-reaching, border-crossing transnational feminist projects we consider here. Yet transnational feminist work points us to ways that collaborative writing can help us build new solidarities, share academic skills, and pluralise and deepen our understanding of the international. Doing so requires a commitment to “the undercommons” (Moten and Harney 2004; Harney and Moten 2013; Dennis 2018) — those singular socialities based on refusal and flight within, and from, the university—as possible vectors for a radicalized practice of study

### *Time and the Academy*

The cultivation of undercommons and collaborative writing practices requires rethinking our relationship with time and the temporalities of the academy. Critical scholars contest ways to navigate and contest the demands of the neoliberal academy (De Jong et al 2019; Bhabra et al 2018; Tuck and Yang 2012). As part of these discussions, scholars discuss ways to practically utilize time and institutional privilege. Some feminist scholars seek to combat the demands within the neoliberal university by cultivating instead “a feminist ethics of care” that privileges “collective action and the contention that good scholarship requires time to think, write, read, research, analyze, edit, organize, and resist the growing administrative and professional demands that disrupt these crucial processes of intellectual growth and personal freedom” (Mountz et al. 2015, 1236, also: Berg and Seeber 2016). On the other hand, Meyerhoff and Noterman counter that a politics of slow scholarship relies on and reinforces a romanticized view of the university: that the academy was once an inclusive place of quiet contemplation, that is now being reduced to market speed-up. Instead, they argue that the academy “isn’t broken, but rather it was built this way—shaped in the image of



modernist/colonial fantasies” (Meyerhoff and Noterman 2017, 24). Rather than calling for a return to an imagined slow-paced academy, these authors argue that the current moment requires “more and different forms of fast as well as slow scholarship—not for the sake of publication metrics, but to enable timely response to current events that academic institutions and norms do not currently value” (Meyerhoff and Noterman 2017, 24). One strategy Meyerhoff and Noterman offer is to reject the temptation to constantly think of academic time in terms of mere scarcity — the continual need for “more hours to work within the linear time of capitalist development of time” — and instead actively create “*eventful* time,” such that “our work — individually and collectively — can become its own productive, self-positing and self-differentiating movement” (Meyerhoff, Johnson, and Braun 2017, 487).

We found that our experiment with collaborative writing provided a taste of what it means to treat writing as eventful time. While our article “in a day” ultimately took two years to see the light of day, the quality of the hours we spent writing was quite high. Attempting to write an article in a day is the very opposite of “slow scholarship”. Yet our collaborative writing methodology generated the type of care ethic that slow scholarship advocates. Over two years, different authors worked together in creative and deeply meaningful ways, cultivating friendships and getting to know each other in ways not possible through the standard practices of academic writing. When time is reduced to scarcity, a heaviness, exhaustion, and isolation often follow. In contrast, the levity, sense of freedom and possibility that accompanied this writing time allowed us to engage in meaningful and eventful collaboration.

*Gendered Writing*

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3 Attention to the gendered dynamics of academic writing provides a way to examine its social  
4 relations and practices more closely. During a conference discussion in 2018 about this  
5 project, someone asked about gender representation among the many authors of this paper.  
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7 The questioner implied it was an all-male paper with a woman tacked on at the end for the  
8 appearance of gender balance. That question is welcome. Despite a growing trend in  
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10 coauthored work in Political Science, Teele and Thelen (2017) find that most scholarly  
11 collaborations in this discipline comprise all-male teams. Moreover, they suggest that men  
12 are disproportionately rewarded for participating in coauthoring networks (in terms of  
13 hiring, promotion, tenure and future publications) and that women's contributions to  
14 coauthored research are often discounted or attributed to male collaborators (Teale and  
15 Thelen 2017, 437-39).  
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28 While our initial list of invitees to the project was quite diverse, the Southampton  
29 Summit was indeed five white guys. AU4 joined the project after the first draft because she  
30 was unable to travel to Southampton for (gendered) reasons. The project came at a time in  
31 which AU4 had not been able to write for over a year, a writer's block rooted in a sense of  
32 alienation connected to her frustration with academic IR debates and formal disciplinary  
33 spaces, including the big conferences. To AU4, the discipline felt increasingly disconnected  
34 from the extreme social, economic, political and transnational struggles facing her students,  
35 her communities, and herself.  
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46 Narrowly-framed questions of gender representation can gloss over important  
47 dynamics that are worth parsing out more explicitly: How do dominant knowledge-making  
48 practices in IR shape what we (think we) understand about international politics? How and  
49 who do these practices serve to in/exclude? How might we rethink these practices? What  
50 might such a rethinking mean for how we understand international politics? In brief, we  
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want to suggest that serious scrutiny of knowledge-making practices in IR requires much more than counting (gendered) bodies.

A number of research projects have recently highlighted gendered and racialized exclusions in academia, including invited presentations, conference panels, and, particularly, citation gaps. Researchers examine the gender of authors in high profile IR journals and gendered citation patterns in the field (Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013). Researchers code authors' (presumed) gender and their institutional and geographic locations (Maliniak et al. 2018). With these important studies in mind, we were impressed by the *X* editors' attention to the gendered and racialized citation gaps and their encouragement that we actively address this while writing and revising our manuscript.<sup>5</sup>

That said, a focus on body counts has some obvious limitations. While this focus is important it often conceals the deeper structural inequalities that critical race and feminist scholars point to in their critiques of the discipline.

Efforts to promote diversity (in IR bibliographies, for example) often fall short of scrutinizing the formal structures of disciplinary knowledge-making practices themselves, including the role of the academic conference. Rather than just promoting gender, racial and geographic diversity and representation within existing formal academic structures, it is important to stand back and consider what kinds of knowledges of the international disciplinary institutions in/exclude and reproduce. Doing so is a messy task that requires critical conceptual (re)examinations, sociologies and ethnographies of disciplinary knowledge-making, and commitment to learn from others (and not just academics). While such studies in IR are few (notable exceptions include Lightfoot 2016; Vitalis 2015; Peterson

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<sup>5</sup> We also used the TRIP journal database to scrutinize and expand the bibliography before submission.

2017; Henderson 2013, 2017 and others), transnational feminist scholars, postcolonial theorists, critical geographers and indigenous studies scholars have examined the politics of knowledge-making practices in much greater depth (see for example Ybarra 2019).<sup>6</sup>

For example, Lightfoot's *Global Indigenous Politics* (2016), does pay attention to the complex ways that indigeneity, geographic location, institutional location combine to shape knowledge-making in/about IR. Her meticulous and far-reaching work examines the contributions of indigenous scholars, activists and practitioners to international relations theory and praxis, even as these critical contributions have not always been widely acknowledged as IR. In doing so, Lightfoot shows how situated knowledges and political praxis shape both disciplinary and political agendas, concepts, categories, and in/exclusions in international relations, from UN meetings to IR reading lists.

Relatedly, our writing process challenged each of us to scrutinize the often-unstated social relations that enable (or limit) our academic work. AU4 observed how the theoretical commitments of the paper played out in the writing process:

... I want to say something about the people involved in this paper. I noticed that they each went above and beyond out of their way to reach out to provide me and others with support and collaboration within and beyond this project. These efforts included speaking up about gendered racism in formal academic spaces (big wig conference panels), co-creating spaces for anti-colonial knowledge-making at ISA (spaces that included my students),

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<sup>6</sup> See for example the collaborative transnational work of the Sangtin writers (2016), Richa Nagar (2010; 2014), and the North West Detention Center Resistance's Hunger Strikers Handbook (2017).

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3 providing extensive comments on works in progress, to encouraging me and  
4  
5 others to put ideas into writing. I venture that these small and large practices  
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7 go far beyond “hacking the academic conference” (as we initially described  
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9 our project). I understood these efforts to cultivate relationships, spaces and  
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11 social practices as attempts to challenge and transform the discipline’s narrow  
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13 agenda, rigid paradigmatic organization, and impoverished central concepts.  
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15 I’m incredibly grateful for this group, its experimental and imaginative  
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17 practices, and its substantive contribution. I don’t take this lightly and I hope  
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19 I can take these examples to inform my own academic work in the future,  
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21 including my teaching and community collaborations.  
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28 When developing collaborative writing projects, it is vital to consider gender representation,  
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30 as well as race, class, disability, and many other forms of diversity. Were we to run this  
31  
32 experiment again, we would spend more time at the outset reflecting on how we went about  
33  
34 inviting participants. While our initial invitation list was gender balanced, we ended up with a  
35  
36 “manel” at the original workshop as several women had to decline participation for (often  
37  
38 gendered) reasons. Yet as AU4 points out, feminist academic practice cannot simply be  
39  
40 reduced to body counts and narrow questions of representation. It is of course certainly  
41  
42 possible to have a gender balanced panel or even an all-female panel while leaving many  
43  
44 academic hierarchies and patriarchal and colonial practices in place. Despite the gender  
45  
46 imbalance in our initial attempt at a one-day writing workshop, our hope is that our  
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48 collaborative technique can be developed and expanded for future feminist-informed  
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50 research.  
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*Anarchy is what the authors make it*

Our collaborative writing project highlighted the problems of governance in the writing process. It forced us to rethink the authorial voice and the ways that groups are constituted in order to ensure the processes of writing are consonant with our desired ends (Prichard 2017; Kinna, Prichard and Swann 2019). The formal constraints of the peer-reviewed journal article format posed one major obstacle. Our own desire to produce academic knowledge differently came into tension with the editorial policies of journals and their socio-political regimes of discipline. For example, even while remaining committed to horizontal organization, the formal constraints pushed us to the conclusion that we needed more dictatorial oversight. These tensions created an opportunity to re-examine the question of authorship.

When we think of authorship, we tend to think in terms of control, authority, and identifiable points of expression. The word itself derives from the Latin: to originate, to lead, and later in old English “to command.” In other words, the author *is* an identifiable authority, a leader in their field, someone amassing social capital in the struggle for recognition and a career. Authorship in its standard guise proceeds on the basis that conceptual vocabularies are settled or bracketed. When writing alone, such issues can perhaps be overlooked more easily. Complexity, power and the tensions generated by representation are much easier to obscure and streamline when we articulate our individual voices. After all, we are trained to speak as if in command of our subject matter. We speak with authority yet we (as individual authors) remain disciplined by the governmentality of the neoliberal academy. We must *be* productive writers with content and ideas attributable to us as individuals. These ideas must be original, citable, and fundable, with the ultimate aspiration of attaining a permanent position at an elite institution (perhaps), with a large

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grant, and a team of students and junior scholars that accompany us on our explorations to the outer boundaries of knowledge.

As Barthes (1994) famously argued, by the 1970s, this account of the author had died. Authorship, from his perspective was the re-presentation of that which was absent. Our conceptual vocabularies are always already part of and shaping of our ‘world hoods’ (see also Colson 2018, Berenskoetter 2016, Heidegger 1996, 59-67). A traditional claim to ‘authorship’ consists of three separate premises that follow the logic of representation more broadly (Cohn 2006, 22). First, the claim that a text speaks without its author; second, that the author speaks through the text; and, third, that the meaning of a text is consistent with the author’s intentions. Each of these three claims is epistemically dubious and politically suspect. But if we cannot appropriate meaning, claim dominium such that ideas can be attributable, conclusively, to one person, what is the alternative?

The epistemic and ethical foundationlessness of the authorial voice generates real political difficulties that an anarchist politics is uniquely well situated to resolve.<sup>7</sup> If authorship is socially constituted, its democratization and co-constitution is one means to reclaim alienated labour. The democratic communalization of authorship ensures the emergent properties of collective labour can be communally attributable (Lawson 2012, Prichard 2017).

Our co-writing experiment exposes five key features of the authorial process, which, once better understood, we feel enable better collaboration and better writing. The first structure is the external socio-political environment in which the collective writing took place. Our initial impetus and first writing day were shaped through-and-through by the

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<sup>7</sup> See also Dennis’ discussion on the “unmarked scholar” (2019)

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3 structures of the neoliberal university, including the time pressures placed upon us to  
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5 produce, as individuals, quality work that may not be possible in any great quantity. Access  
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7 to academic funding shaped all aspects of the initial workshop, allowing participants to  
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9 travel, stay in town, and for all of us to continue work over dinner afterwards, while it  
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11 excluded other from participating in the first place. The neoliberal university constituted the  
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13 group of authors, as well as the conditions of our labor, but also the possibility of resistance.  
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17 After recognizing the emergent quality of the initial group, the second governance  
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19 process sought to engage and challenge these dominations directly *through the process of writing*  
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21 *itself*. These involved the anarchistic decision-making we adopted, like go-rounds, consensus,  
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23 and mutual aid, and the voluntary empowerment of a ‘dictator’ in the latter stages of the  
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25 project. The day itself was also structured by all participants in ways that ensured that it met  
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27 our needs in terms of writing styles, personal time, and other commitments.  
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31 Third, this writing process helped us to identify and manage expertise and the plural  
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33 and intersecting hierarchies that developed through the writing process itself. Whether it was  
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35 in terms of writings styles, or subject knowledge, experience with/as journal editors, and so  
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37 on, each was negotiated and the hierarchy agreed consensually. Authority/authorship  
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39 became a process of deferring to authority, delegating authority, and, most importantly  
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41 perhaps in a collaborative process, relinquishing authorship and authority over words  
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43 themselves.  
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47 Fourth, the demand to be inclusive and consensual meant a continual agonistic to-  
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49 and-fro, ensuring that the outcome, whether a single line-edit or the decision about which  
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51 journal to publish in, reflected and was able to meet the needs of the group. Our  
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53 disagreements were hugely productive. AU5 must have made the case against making the  
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55 distinction between ‘causal and constitutive’ on at least four occasions, but was overruled. In  
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AU5s view there is no non-causal causation; constitutive processes are causal too. This challenge forced AU1 and AU5 to think through and justify the framework they adopted.

Finally, authority and authorship became more complex and emergent once *X* became involved in the process. It is perhaps ironic that the *X* review process was highly vertical and yet none of us objected to *X*'s demands. We were all excited and eager to please. While some of us adamantly rejected the request for a table, we produced one anyway. Fixing editorial demands that we eliminate the passive voice were irritations, but also revelations. So much of what AU5 achieved from the co-writing process was being forced to learn the Toulmin method and the specifics of US writing styles. There was also much less consensus at this stage. The pressures and prize of publishing in *X* meant we did as we were told by the Editor at *X* and by our elected dictator, AU2.

At times, these tensions were very productive because of our acts of resistance to them. Our collaboration was a process of managing and responding to these five processes so that the output remained a common property developed in ways consistent with the principle of mutual aid. This co-writing experiment was interesting as a sociology/ethnography of collaboration and consensus, of authority and the emergence of writing, authorship and control. Authorship is never reducible to the author, it is always an emergent property, an assemblage, of authority structures and competing interests, skills, capacities, and so on. We might say that a peer reviewed journal article is an assemblage of things, an anarchic product, one that has no final point of authorship. What was interesting about our project was the way that multiple, sometimes competing centres of power emerged and receded in importance, with no final point of authority, an anarchy of sorts. While the project supervened on our collaborative inputs (author redacted), all collaborative writing needs its own constitutive process. It must be conscious, consensual and changeable.

## Conclusion

The collaborative writing process succeeded beyond our wildest expectations, despite a number of obstacles. None of us could have imagined publishing an article in one of the top journals in the discipline after a one-day workshop. The paper contains ideas that individual contributors have thought deeply about, and there are parts where one authors is the only person to have engaged that work or possesses key technical and methodological skills. It is a weird and rewarding experience to read an article and see it as one's own, yet not quite "mine."

The experiment also raised a number of theoretical questions about representation, knowledge production, and authorship. We look forward to running this experiment again and seeing what remains constant and what changes across different iterations. At the very least, participating in this effort has created a different political imaginary concerning what academic knowledge production might look like. We hope more people will experiment with integrating collaborative writing into professional conference settings. Doing so, we believe, will create unique and dynamic opportunities to meet, engage, and develop meaningful intellectual relationships with people across the academy.

Can a group of near strangers write a paper in a day? No, but you should definitely try the impossible.

## APPENDIX 1: Practical advice

For those interesting in trying to co-write an article in a day, here is some practical advice:

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1. We found that having our summit in a computer lab was really helpful. Make sure to bring a flash drive. Even in a computer lab, translating documents across computers can be tricky (and time is of the essence!). Having access to a whiteboard or chalkboard is also helpful.
2. By accident, the paper ended up being a theoretical argument framed around a specific text: “What is wrong with Steven Pinker’s argument?” While we had to push Pinker further into the background during the revision process, this focus initially lent coherence to a writing project that might otherwise have become far too nebulous. In re-running this experiment, one option would be to start with some structuring prompt. If we had intentionally organized the Southampton Summit this way, it would have been possible, for example, for everyone to come having read Pinker’s book, and maybe even arrive with some pre-writing. On the other hand, we found that our completely open slate allowed for emergent, horizontal collaboration that might have been lost if the project started out overly framed and focused.
3. Having an outside reader who joined the project after an initial draft ended up clarifying the project. It also helped us work against any notions of “whose section is whose.” It might be worth considering building this feature into future iterations.
4. After our initial eight-hour session at University of Southampton, it might have been helpful to have another day (or two) to keep hammering things out. By the end of the one-day summit, we were simultaneously exhausted and exhilarated. We could see something exciting coming into focus, but we all had to leave early the next

1 morning. Having another day or two together would have streamlined the drafting  
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3 phase of the project quite considerably. One could imagine a day of writing, reading  
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5 the completed draft, a dinner, drinks, sleep, breakfast, an outing or activity, general  
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7 conversation, an afternoon of group or individual writing, lunch, check-in, re-  
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9 compile the draft, dinner, drinks, repeat. But, then again, the severe time constraints  
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11 may have helped to spur creativity and productivity.  
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- 19 5. Group dynamics are very important. You need to trust and respect each other, and  
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21 not be too precious about your writing. To this end, we did not use track changes  
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23 during the editing process. Instead, we created a new document each time the  
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25 document circulated to a different co-author. When track changes were used, it was  
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27 largely to highlight something that was unclear or to pose a question. The practice of  
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29 editing the text directly proved an important part of the process. You have to let go  
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31 of your writing early on. Trust your co-authors and help with the subsequent editing,  
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33 rather than insist on a 'party line edit'. The key is to have a strong sense of the  
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35 interconnected nature of the process and goal. What emerges will not be what any  
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37 one author wanted, but might be what you all preferred (without knowing it before  
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39 hand). Co-writing created a mechanism to facilitate trust and respect.  
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- 46 6. We opted for the functionality of Word over the shareability of Google Docs. This  
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48 meant that version control became a serious issue early on. As we began circulating  
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50 drafts, we used a shared Dropbox folder and each author saved a new version of the  
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52 paper with the date of revision in the title. As Dropbox cannot support two authors  
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54 working on the document at the same time, we established a clear circulation order  
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and timeline. This helped everyone stay on point and it encouraged shared monitoring. If Ilan had completed his tasks and turned it over to Jonathan, for example, Jonathan felt responsible to build on Ilan’s work, and the pressure to get revisions to Jonneke by the agreed upon date.

- 7. Working with six authors with different writing styles was challenging at times. Some of us wrote very poor first drafts and then cleaned them up over time. Others liked to outline and elaborate on an outline. Make time for discussion at the outset about writing processes, writing styles, and target journals (each of which have their own style guidelines). We ended up modifying Word documents because that was the only software system with which everyone was familiar. In retrospect, some effort to learn about a collaborative writing system early on could have saved us time.
- 8. Managing citations can be challenging. Some of us use Zotero or EndNote, others just write citations manually. In this project we ended up with over 180 citations, which would be unwieldy and a lot of work to enter manually. Again, we could have learned to use a shared reference manager, such as Zotero.

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